

Discussion sheet



PEOPLE GATHER AROUND FOOD

Food as the focus for celebration, joy and thankfulness

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of the table

*Preparing traditional food, Choiseul
Province, Solomon Islands.
Photo: Kastom Gaden Association*



Celebrating food and culture

FOOD NOURISHES and connects us. Every day, all over the world, people gather around food, whether for the simple satisfaction of hunger or to re-create the bonds that connect us — what the noted Australian chef and author, Stephanie Alexander, calls “the community of the table”.

Many cultures set aside special times to celebrate the diversity and sacredness of food as an everyday resource. Different cultures honour food in different ways.

Papua New Guinea - Sing Sing Festival

Pigs are highly valued in New Guinea and play an important role in these feast. The pigs are cooked over hot rocks and shared among tribes that participate in the festival.

India - Rice Harvest Festival

The festival occurs at the end of the cropping season in both rural and urban areas and is celebrated in conjunction with the Diwali Pooja – the Festival of Lights.

Hindu folk art is made on the floor during these special occasions. Preparation of food involves drying fruits, almonds and cashews, and the pounding of half-cooked rice.

China- New Year Festival

The festival brings the Chinese community together through the preparation of traditional foods that symbolise abundance, wealth and good luck in the New Year.

Australian Aborigines

Traditional Aboriginal communities hold corroborees, ceremonies that celebrate occasions such as initiation, the sharing of art or plentiful food. Following music and traditional stories and dance, a feast of seasonally available food is shared among the tribe.

...We can learn from these traditions to bring together people from different cultural backgrounds around food.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What role has food played in the celebration of some of the major events in your life?

How do the ways you relate to food nourish both your body and your spirit?

Do we dishonour food by wasting it?

How sacred is food if people, animals or landscapes have been exploited in producing it? - eg. factory farming of cash crops like tea or bananas

Do you think special foods are sacred or do you regard all food as sacred?

Practical ways to build community through the pleasure of food

- eat locally grown food where possible.
- grow some of your own food – involve children in growing and harvesting it – make it fun
- ask someone you know from a faith about how food is used in their rituals
- ask someone you know from a different ethnic background about how food is used in their celebrations.
- find a way for your family to give thanks for food.
- organise an intercultural food feast
- organise a street party
- organise a harvest festival at your local community garden.

Community food

THE SLOW FOODS MOVEMENT

Founded in Italy in 1986, the international Slow Foods movement promotes food and wine culture and encourages interest in traditional types of cheeses, grains, vegetables and animal breeds by bringing them back into mainstream food markets. Slow Foods is active in most developed countries.

Slow Foods protects the pleasures of the table from the sameness brought by fast food and modern life. The organisation actively promotes gastronomic culture and the preservation of agricultural biodiversity.

BRISBANE – NORTHEY STREET HARVEST FESTIVAL

Community gardeners at Brisbane's Northey Street City Farm celebrate the harvest of their crops as a way to bring people together and to educate them about the life cycle of the plants we eat.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Agricultural training agency, the Kastom Gaden Association, has organised taro and banana diversity fairs where farmers and villagers learn about the varieties of these important crops and exchange planting material. www.terracircle.org.au

Food and Spirituality

'Food is more than fuel. Food is about nurturing. It's about mother love; it's about sharing a meal with guests; it's about bringing people to the table; it's about talking — these are the spiritual components of community, I suppose' ...Roman Koval.

For **Christians**, bread and wine — 'fruit of the vine and work of human hands' — becomes the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

The sharing of the Eucharist binds people to each other and to Christ, thus nourishing their spiritual life and empowering them to reach out to the needy.

hindus

For **Hindus**, *Prasad* is food that is distributed after the prayer ritual, *pujah*.

Hindus are urged to think positive thoughts of peace and love when preparing food, to regard food with honour and to eat it with reverence so as to acknowledge its life-giving spirit.

muslims

For **Muslims**, *Ramadan* is a time when fasting serves as a reminder of the joy of food, the need to give heartfelt thanks and the duty to share with the needy. The time of fasting is closely linked with the reading of the Koran and to prayer.

At sunset, when fasting is broken, Muslims thank God for the food and for the other blessings of life. Their prayers remind them that God created food and that they need to regard it as sacred. For followers of the prophet Mohammed, following the prescribed dietary laws is a reflection of respect for creation.

buddhists

For **Buddhists**, the temple is often the place where the community shares food. Traditionally, monks rely on the generosity of fellow Buddhists to provide them with food.

The mindfulness encouraged by Buddhism helps people regard food and its preparation as sacred.

indigenous

Indigenous spirituality is celebrated with food. The Aymara, who live in the Andes region of South America, give thanks as they eat and as they plant seeds, praying that all people will share in the fruits of the earth.

Each year, they have a day of penitence and forgiveness which starts with a communal meal.

jews

For **Jews**, the Passover meal, besides commemorating the history of their journey out of slavery, also calls to mind many of their basic beliefs. The lamb, the bitter herbs, the unleavened bread are all an essential part of a ritual that is full of praise and thanksgiving and that is steeped in an awareness of the Earth.

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